

# Elementary teachers' expectations and perceptions of school counselors

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## Abstract

*This qualitative study explores the expectations and perceptions elementary teachers have of school counselors. Participants were current or past students in an elementary education graduate program at a southeastern university. The participants responded to an open-ended online survey that consisted of questions that focused on the demographics of their schools and the expectations and perceptions they had of the school counselor's roles and responsibilities pertaining to both academic achievement and student behavior. Although responses varied, the data suggests that there was substantial concern regarding the time and availability of the school counselor, implications of the use of counselors as school standardized testing administrators, and respondents' desires for school counselors to focus on the severe emotional and behavioral needs of students.*

## Introduction

Since its introduction in the late nineteenth century, school counseling has undergone many changes.<sup>1</sup> Accompanying these changes have been significant conflicts pertaining to the actual versus perceived roles of school counselors. Burnham and Jones emphasized that school counseling roles are often problematic by definition.<sup>2</sup> The perception of school counselors from various professional stakeholders includes seeing the school counselor acting as an "educational leader, student advocate, and social change agent," while others suggest the role encompasses disciplinarian, administrator, and behavior manager.<sup>3</sup>

Counselors are given job descriptions they are expected to follow. Literature suggests that some descriptions of the school counselors' expected roles and functions from various stakeholders overlap those described by school counselors, however some elements differ. These differences can be perceived as limitations of working with a school counselor or, in some situations, the perceived ineffectiveness of school counselors.

The perceptions and expectations elementary school teachers have of school counselors may play a major role in defining the preferred or expected duties of an elementary school counselor. As previously mentioned, these perceptions and expectations tend to vary. A qualitative survey exploring perceived expectations and perceptions of their elementary school counselors was designed to further explore the expectations and perceptions of school counselors within the mentioned geographical region. The survey was

presented to thirty-eight past or present elementary education graduate students from a southeastern university. Six participants responded to the ten-question survey. The following provides an overview of previous research that focuses on the roles of school counselors, a detailed description of the study, and the themes that were derived from the study:

## Literature Review

### *History of school counseling*

Counseling first found its place within schools in the late nineteenth century when Jesse Davis introduced a counseling program in a Detroit high school.<sup>1</sup> The goal of Davis' program was "to help students develop character, avoid problems, and relate vocational interests to coursework."<sup>4</sup> Due to the industrialization and urbanization at that time, there was a heightened awareness of the need for vocational counseling in schools.<sup>4</sup> After the implementation of the first program, vocational counseling began to evolve to school counseling. Frank Parsons, often referred to as the father of guidance, is credited with creating this movement.<sup>1,5</sup> Parsons paired his attention to vocational guidance with his concern for society's failure to provide adequate resources for the growth and development of children.<sup>1</sup> Dahir and Stone state that Parson, and those who followed him, emphasized the ideas that individuals must understand their individual abilities, goals, and weaknesses; individuals must have a knowledge of the world around them, the opportunities and options it holds, and what each opportunity and option requires; and, individuals must combine knowledge of self with awareness

of the world around them. Counselors serve as guides to help individuals meet these goals.<sup>1</sup> Gybers and Henderson described the transformation from vocational guidance to school counseling as a movement from a position to a service to a comprehensive program.<sup>5</sup>

When counseling was introduced into schools, teachers were often appointed to the position of vocational counselor. This position rarely came with relief from common teaching duties or increased pay.<sup>5</sup> School counseling was not considered a profession until the mid-twentieth century. This accomplishment was marked by the formation of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) in 1952.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past several years, the number of school counseling programs has increased. Although many school counselors believe they have been excluded from conversations focused on changes in curriculum and instruction, school counseling has undergone major transformation. Schmidt, Lanier, and Cope state that the increase in school counseling programs is a result of legislation including the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act, Public Law 94-142, currently No Child Left Behind, and *A Nation at Risk* which created a focus on the accountability of schools.<sup>6</sup> Schmidt, Lanier, and Cope further suggest that societal changes and student challenges have increased the awareness that all students benefit from comprehensive counseling programs. As policies and school reform initiatives continue to be introduced (e.g. Race to the Top, Common Core, and a forthcoming revision to the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act), the role of school counselors remains relevant for students,

teachers, and schools.

### *Children's need for school counseling*

Connolly and Protheroe state, "today's schools are judged by what their students know and are able to do. Local, state, and national accountability mandates send the clear message that it is no longer acceptable for significant segments of the student population to be underserved."<sup>7</sup> However, this change in focus that has occurred from *some students succeeding to all students succeeding* comes during a time of smaller budgets, declining revenues, and fewer resources.<sup>7</sup> Although the resources, such as finances and assistance programs, might not be readily available, children's needs for school counseling remain. According to Dahir and Stone, many students have to face physical, emotional, social, and economic barriers that can inhibit successful learning.<sup>1</sup> Christiansen stated that more and more children are becoming "at risk" for failure in school as a result of family structure, violence, abuse and neglect, and a variety of disabilities.<sup>8</sup> He recommends that school counselors and teachers work together to help students overcome the obstacles in their path by offering mentoring, utilizing students' special hobbies and interests, creating positive relationships among significant adults and students, and developing family support.<sup>8</sup> Further, he suggests that school counselors and teachers play a vital role in carrying out the above mentioned tasks, but only by understanding the school as an entire entity can counselors help meet the complex needs of students that teachers might not be able to do on their own.

According to Weissberg and O'Brien, one particular challenge that faces twenty-first century schools is the large number of students who have high social and emotional needs, experience mental health problems, and engage in harmful activities such as substance abuse, violence, and other self-destructive behavior.<sup>9</sup> During elementary, school students develop many social skills during classroom instruction and counseling.<sup>10</sup> According to Gallagher, teachers and counselors are encouraged to support the development of social skills. All activities are designed to encourage students and decrease frustration, which opens a path for success. Weissberg concurs that social and emotional learning addresses the needs of children and the fragmentation that frequently exists in schools.<sup>9</sup> Research in the past three decades has shown that social and emotional learning skills can be taught through programs offered by individual schools. Dahir and Stone provide several examples of the impact school counseling has on students.

Research suggests that high-quality counseling services can have long-term effects on a child's well-being and can prevent a student from turning to violence and drug or alcohol abuse. High-quality school counseling services can also improve a student's academic achievement. Studies on the effects of school counseling have shown positive effects on student's grades, reducing classroom disruptions, and enhancing teachers' abilities to manage classroom behavior effectively. High quality school counseling services also can help address students' mental health needs.<sup>1</sup>

Dahir and Stone continue by stating that even though several federally-funded programs such as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Demonstration Act (ESDA) have been implemented and drawn attention to the effect school counselors have on the lives of students, much more must be done to evaluate the effectiveness of school counseling programs.<sup>1</sup> Worzby and O'Rourke posit that the events that happen to elementary school students during the early stages of development will have an impact on their coping behaviors later in life. They continue by suggesting that "an elementary school counseling program is designed to assist the school and community in addressing the full range of variables affecting the teaching/learning process, from meeting children's needs to creating new growth to producing learning environments for them."<sup>11</sup> Clark and Amatea place emphasis on this point by noting that "educators are recognizing that when schools attend to students' social and emotional skills, the academic achievement of children increases, the incidence of problem behaviors decreases, and the quality of the relationships surrounding each child improves."<sup>3</sup>

### *Overview of the perceptions, expectations, and actual role of school counselors*

Burnham and Jackson state that "school counseling roles are often problematic in definition, interpretation, and implementation."<sup>22</sup> Counselors today are expected to fulfill the traditional roles that pertain to school and career counseling, host consultations with parents and faculty, organize student registration, administer several required tests, provide professional development, supervise staff members, and conduct administrative tasks.<sup>12</sup> Ford continues by stating that, due to the student-to-counselor ratio (561:1), school counselors serve a major role in schools. According to Clark and Amatea, the perception of the school counselor from various parties

includes seeing the school counselor acting as an "educational leader, student advocate, and social change agent."<sup>3</sup> While trying to fulfill the required and requested roles, school counselors are asked to distinguish priorities for the programs and then follow up by implementing those priorities.<sup>13</sup>

Even though counselors have a well-known presence in school districts across the states, this particular profession was omitted from many of the educational reform movements of the past.<sup>1</sup> However, advocates are hoping this will change. Dahir and Stone present the changes that have occurred in defining the role of the school counselor by listing the traditional role focus and the transformed role focus of school counselors in a comparison chart. Role foci such as "individual students' concerns and issues, student scheduler, primary focus on personal and social development" have been transformed to "proactive prevention and intervention for every student, develop a program of study with student based on education and career goals, and academic career and personal social development."<sup>1</sup> Worzby and O'Rourke (1989) state that the primary purpose of school counseling programs is to "enhance and improve the learning environment of the school so that each child in the elementary school has an opportunity to learn the best of his or her capacity." In turn, school counselors have the duty to intervene in the students' lives and intervene in the learning environment within schools to ensure that children learn to become free and responsible.<sup>11</sup> Typical roles designated to the school counselors are those such as group and individual counseling, interpreting test results, tending to children's concerns, and leading classroom guidance activities.<sup>14</sup> Cooper, Hough, and Loynd state "that counseling is going to work best when the basic attitudes and principles of counseling inform the whole school."<sup>15</sup> Wilgus and Shelly advocate that "what is needed are counselors who are action oriented, not reactive; creative, not complacent; aggressive, not passive; and energetic, not lethargic. Commitment is required."<sup>13</sup>

### *Counselor's description of their job duties*

While teachers and principals have varying expectations and perceptions of the school counselor roles, counselors tend to have their own beliefs about their job duties. Ginter, Scalise, and Presse indicate that an issue faced by most counselors is the specific duties they are supposed to perform, and the effectiveness of the counselor's job can be altered by conflict between the counselor's definition and other parties', such as principals and teachers definition of

the counselor's role.<sup>14</sup> In their study, Wilgus and Shelley questioned school counselors from seven elementary schools in the about the definition of their role.<sup>13</sup> After the counselors responded, staff members were asked to describe the counselor's role and rank the jobs as what seemed to be appropriate and then the duties that they deemed as inappropriate. The following groups of job duties were derived after the school counselors were asked to describe their role: parent education, guidance and counseling-oriented meetings, non-guidance and counseling-oriented meetings, individual counseling, group counseling, classroom programs, recognition programs, staff consultation, individual testing, group testing, staff development, referrals, classroom observation, and parent contact. There were also a number of activities that did not fall into any of these categories. These particular duties fell into a category labeled as "Other". Some duties the counselors include while describing their job are identical to those of the other staff members, such as teachers, while others tend to differ.

*Teacher perceptions and expectations of school counselors*

Due to its long history, there is much research that surrounds the topic of school counseling. The topics of this research vary in nature, but more salient to this research surrounds perceptions and expectations of the school counselor's role. The role of the school counselor can be explained differently depending on who is describing it.

Of all the perceptions and expectations that surround the role of the school counselor, the ones teachers hold have a high importance due to the fact that teacher perceptions and expectations also influence the perceptions and expectations of principals, parents, and students which, in turn, affects the counseling program.<sup>16</sup> On a day-to-day basis, teachers see the impact situations have on each of their students. According to Cooper, Hough, and Loynd there is a crossing point that exists between education and therapy and teachers stand at this point. It is also stated that "teachers represent the largest body of professionals on whom the success of a school-based counseling service is likely to depend."<sup>15</sup>

*Counselors as collaborators*

Past research suggests that teachers hold an overall positive view of the school counselor and see school counselors as a much needed resource.<sup>15</sup> Educators are beginning to recognize that as students' emotional and social needs are attended to, the academic achievement, behavior, and quality of relationships tend to increase

for students.<sup>3</sup> School counselors act as an independent presence in the school that allows students to have someone to discuss problematic or troubling situations with that is not a typical party such as a parent or teacher.<sup>15</sup>

There are several roles of the school counselor that are held in high importance to teachers. Clark and Amatea propose that one major role of the school counselor is that of teacher consultation that will help students have higher achievement levels in school. As a result, there has been an increased emphasis on the counselor's role and impact on academic achievement. Results from their survey revealed that thirteen out of the twenty-three participants discussed the necessity of collaboration where teachers and counselors worked together as a team. Clark and Amatea continue by explaining that this emphasis makes it clear that collaboration with teachers is necessary in order to provide the best services for students pertaining to their academic and career development and social needs.<sup>3</sup> Bemak states "it is critical that school counselors work closely with other professionals in the school."<sup>17</sup> While this includes stakeholders such as administrators, it also includes teachers. As Bemak's description of appropriate collaboration continues, he states that working closely with teachers should include, among other things, observing and discussing classroom performance and helping invent and provide academic-support programs that address academic and social needs.<sup>17</sup> Reiner acknowledges the fact that teachers support collaboration and many other activities as some of the appropriate responsibilities of the school counselor. However, the teachers felt as though counselors never or rarely took part in a portion of the appropriate activities. Among these activities was collaborating with "teachers to present guidance curriculum lesson, present proactive prevention-based guidance curriculum lessons, and provide teachers with suggestions for better study hall management."<sup>16</sup> Collaboration and strong relationships between teachers and counselors, as well as administrators, are fundamental factors in a school's effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

When counselors are viewed as collaborators, it is not only collaboration with teachers, but with principals as well. Connolly and Protheroe theorize that when school counselors collaborate with administrators as well as other school faculty on topics such as effective learning environments, the amount of work that needs to be completed becomes more manageable. Connolly and Protheroe continue by stating that one very effective way for school counselors to collaborate with administrators and teachers

is to use the distributed leadership model, and by providing steps on how to carry out effective collaboration.<sup>7</sup>

*School counselors as administrators*

In their study focusing on teacher perceptions of the professional school counselor role, Reiner, Colbert, and Perusse state that "there are few significant differences between school counselors and their respective school principals."<sup>16</sup> They continue by indicating that the inappropriate tasks that principals typically rated as appropriate for the school counselor are registration and scheduling, administering achievement tests, and maintaining student records. Typically, these tasks are considered to be administrative duties. Reiner, Colbert, Perusse state that eighty percent of principals endorsed these tasks for the school counselors in their schools.<sup>16</sup> Burnham and Jackson discuss Myrick's Model, which describes six direct and indirect counseling services. These services include individual counseling, small group counseling, classroom guidance/large group guidance, consultation, and peer facilitation.<sup>2</sup> The authors state that, according to Myrick, administrative duties, an area in which many counselors do not have much experience, can inappropriately take up fifty percent of a counselor's time.<sup>2</sup> When counselors do not have much clerical assistance, such as the counselors in Burnham and Jackson's study, valuable time can be taken away from the actual roles of the counselor.<sup>2</sup>

**Methods**

*Participants*

The participants of this study were graduate students at a southeastern university. This population of participants was selected in efforts to reach new and veteran teachers who are invested in advanced degrees. An email list was generated to target the desired participants. To ensure confidentiality, the participants were asked to omit the names of their geographic area, schools, counselors, and any other identifying information from their survey responses.

*Request of participants*

Upon receiving the correct authorizations from the Institutional Review Board, information about the research was sent out via email. This email described the purpose of the research, information about the principal investigator, and the goal of the research. The original email was sent to thirty-eight potential participants. After a two-week time period, the same thirty-eight participants received a follow up email explaining that this second email served as a last request for participation. Both

emails described that by completing and submitting the survey, participants provided their informed consent and therefore granted permission for their responses to be considered within the results. A total of six participants elected to participate in the research.

### Method of research

Data were gathered via a survey that consisted of ten closed- and open-ended questions that included demographics of each school as well as the participants' expectations and perceptions of the school counselor's role. Each participant received an email that explained the design and purpose of the research and also contained the link to the survey. After providing the response to each question, the participants submitted the response. Each submission was completely anonymous. Participants' responses were simply labeled with a number that did not provide any identifying information. The survey is included in the appendix and outlined in the following section.

### Data analysis

All six responses were compared, coded, and analyzed. This was completed by analyzing the response to each of the ten questions and placing the surveys in groups that contained similar responses. These similarities were noted using a color-coding scheme. Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyuan define a coding scheme as a "set of categories that an observer uses to record the frequency of a person's or groups behavior."<sup>18</sup> For example, question one asks how many years of experience the respondent has as a teacher.

When comparing all surveys, one color was selected for one to five years of experience, five to ten years of experience, ten to fifteen years of experience, and more than fifteen years of experience. The colors were noted on a coding key. Each survey response was evaluated and coded with the correct color. Each survey question was evaluated and common themes were listed. Colors were then assigned to each common response. If a response did not fit into a common theme, it was marked with a different color to signify that it differed from the rest. After the surveys were divided into these groups, notes were typed to facilitate the comparison of responses of each participant.

### Results

#### Response rate

Six out of the thirty-eight original contacts responded to the survey questions. The total response rate was 15.7%. Due to the sample selected, each respondent had some type of elementary education background. Therefore, each participant's responses were considered when analyzing the data, regardless of their placement at the time the research was completed. Five out of the six respondents responded to every question. The last respondent chose to skip questions six, seven, and ten. Pseudonyms have been used to report and explore the comments of each respondent (Amy, Jesse, Emma, Gabe, Charley, and Toby).

#### Question responses

The responses to questions one through four are provided in the Table 1.

*Question 5: Are you encouraged to work with the*

*school counselor? If so, how?*

All six respondents responded to this question. Amy and Jesse stated that they did not feel as though they were encouraged to work with their school counselor. However, Emma, Gabe, and Toby felt as though they are encouraged to work with their school counselor in various ways. Toby stated that although the counselor is present mostly for the upper grades, he is encouraged to work with the counselor during Bully Prevention month. Toby continued by stating that he knows the counselor is available to him as well as the students whenever needed. Similar to Toby, Gabe stated that he works with the counselor for testing services due to the nature of his position. Contrary to Gabe and Toby, Emma felt as though "teachers are encouraged to contact the counselor when behavior or issues at home causes problems with student learning." Charley did not provide insight to this question due to not having a counselor at her school.

*Question 6: In what ways, if any, has the school counselor worked with your students?*

Only five respondents replied to this question. Due to not having a school counselor, Charley answered this question by stating that it was not applicable. Amy stated that the school counselor sees many of her students on an individual basis. Similarly, Gabe stated that one of the students has been referred to the school counselor to receive individual counseling due to the student's family facing a divorce. Jesse and Emma were very detailed in their descriptions of how the school counselor works with their students. Jesse stated that

Question	Amy	Jesse	Emma	Gabe	Charley	Toby
1. How many years of experience do you have as a teacher?	6 years	3 years	1 year	17 years	5 years	4 years
2. What grade level/ subject areas do you teach?	K-3 Special Education	3rd Grade. The respondent has also taught 2nd grade.	4th grade math	Reading and math for grade 1-8	7th grade language arts	Pre-K/K
3. Briefly describe the demographic of your school. Please do not identify the school by name.	Predominately white with 75% poverty rate	"My school is in a rural county. Ther is a high population of economically disadvantaged children in my school as well as the county. There is not much radical diversity in my school.	"The school is very low income with a 90% non-white population. A large part of the student body comes from broken homes and are on some type of government assistance."	"K-12 in one building; Mostly white/about 10% minority; Not many on free and reduced lunch. About equal with boy/girl ratio."	"Mostly Caucasian students."	"At least 85% poverty, 95% white, 3% Hispanic, 2% African American, 1% Chinese"
4. Does your school have a counselor/ guidance counselor? If so, how many? Please do not identify counselors by name.	One part-time counselor	"My school does have a guidance counselor. We also recently have received a counselor from a facility that is outside of the school that works with people that have emotional/mental disorders."	"Yes, a guidance counselor. One actual counselor and an assistant principal who also handles discipline problems."	"Yes - 1 (several assistants).	No	"Yes, only one."

Table 1. Responses to question 1-4

the counselor has guidance classes with his students. However, the counselor typically reads a book or has the students color or watch a movie. Jesse continued by declaring that the school counselor is not present at school due to them missing a lot of days, and they do not get a substitute. Guidance only occurs during half of the year in this setting. Jesse ended by stating that the counselor does help students get food bags if they are in need. Similar to Gabe, Emma stated that the school counselor has seen students with anger issues. The counselor has worked very closely with one student in particular. However, there are several other students who are facing situations in which counseling was needed due to issues at home or problems in school regarding attendance or behavior.

*Question 7: What assistance, if any, do you expect from a school counselor in regards to helping students gain academic achievement? In what ways has this been helpful or not to the academic achievement of your students?*

Five out of six respondents responded to this question. Amy stated that this question was not applicable. Jesses expressed that he did not expect anything from the counselor in regard to academic achievement. However, he continued by declaring that the counselor does try to assist students in gaining high achievement on TCAP testing by playing a BINGO game about how to act during testing. Emma and Charley had similar responses. Both mentioned that the counselor is present to help students with issues or problems that might be interfering with academic achievement. Emma stated that many times, the counselor is there to help students work out problems such as facing parents who are in jail or do not have custody, as well as issues of bullying. Charley states that counseling students with social issues can help students set their insecurities aside and focus more on academic achievement. Gabe stated that the counselor tends to “stay on top of students” at the high-school level by assisting with college representatives and being readily available for all students.

*Question 8: Do you feel that it is within a counselor's duties to help students with behavior issues in the classroom? If so, how do you believe this should be achieved?*

All six respondents provided an answer to this question. Every respondent stated that the school counselor could be used to assist with students' behavioral issues. However, responses varied based on to what extent this should be part of the counselor's duties. Amy stated that if the counselor is able to perform these duties, then they should be invited to do so. Jesse expounded on this

by saying that the counselor should meet with the teachers and help come up with new ideas regarding how to handle behavior issues. In agreement with Amy and Jesse, Gabe said that this should definitely be a duty of the counselor, especially in the younger grades. He continued by placing emphasis on character education. Emma, Charley and Toby emphasize that the counselors focus should be on those students who have social or emotional needs. However, they state that when these issues become a distraction in the classroom, the counselor should step in and help handle the behavior issues. Charley, as well as Toby, states that this can be best achieved by individual counseling.

*Question 9: What is the primary contribution, if any, you feel that a school counselor provides for you as a teacher, the students, and the school as a whole?*

Every respondent replied to this question. Amy, Jesse, and Emma felt as though the primary contribution of the counselor should be to help students with needs that go beyond the classroom. Respondents stated that this could be anything from emotional/social issues to issues at home. Jesse and Emma stated that the counselor could also work closely with the teacher to address issues in the classroom. Toby felt as though the counselor served as a mediator between students as well as between students and teachers. Additionally, two respondents stated that they felt as though the counselor's primary contribution is in the planning and execution of administrative duties within the school.

*Question 10: What are the challenges and limitations, if any, of working with a school guidance counselor?*

Only five respondents responded to this question. The answers varied. Amy, Jesse, and Gabe shared their concern about the amount of time that counselors were available. This was because of the counselor: student ratio, only having a part-time counselor, or the counselor being absent and not requesting a substitute. Charley agreed by stating that the counselor was responsible for too much paperwork to have adequate time to work with students. Emma stood out by responding that the biggest limitation of working with a school counselor was the fact that sometimes, the school counselor was not approachable. She stated that if a counselor is not approachable, students and teachers tend to feel as though they cannot receive the help they need.

### Discussion

Two potential themes arose from the responses submitted by each participant. This section describes these two potential themes and their relationships to previous

literature. Strengths and limitations of the research and implications for further research are also detailed.

#### *Theme 1: Limitations of time and testing demands*

Time management of the school counselor was a major concern for teachers in this study. The counselor-to-student ratio within many schools causes concern particularly in regards to the fulfillment of the school counselor's duties. This is not taking into consideration that many times, counselors are expected to fulfill other duties such as testing, class scheduling, and administrative tasks. In the responses to the survey, each respondent mentioned the limitation of time placed on the counselor at each school. Four respondents stated that one major limitation of working with their school counselor was the amount of time that the counselor was available to work with students and/or teachers. This could occur because of paperwork or part-time counselors. Amy works within a school that only has one part-time counselor. This further limits the availability of the counselor. Other respondents stated that the counselor is typically busy fulfilling test administration duties or scheduling procedures.

Ford states that counselors today are expected to fulfill the traditional roles that pertain to school and career counseling, host consultations with parents and faculty, organize student registration, administer several required tests, provide professional development, supervise staff members, and conduct administrative tasks.<sup>12</sup> Ford continues by stating that the due to the student-to-counselor ratio (561:1), school counselors serve a major role in schools. These responsibilities further limit the time available for teachers to collaborate and communicate with the school counselor. If teachers feel as though counselors are too busy to fulfill the needs of teachers and students, then these needs can begin to be ignored. While counselors can be responsible for some testing and administrative duties, the main focus should be the needs of students and helping teachers meet the needs of each student. This can come about through individual counseling sessions or small-group counseling. If school boards and administrators wish for school counselors to fulfill both administrative tasks as well as meet the needs of teachers and students, more counselors need to be provided. Teachers will be more apt to communicate with counselors if they feel as though their needs and wants are going to be addressed. This cannot happen if counselors do not even have the time in a given day to listen to the teachers and/or students. By providing more counselors or shortening the

list of responsibilities placed on the school counselor, time will be able to be better managed thereby allowing the needs of teachers and students to be addressed.

### *Theme 2: Focus on students in need*

In this research, the responses provided by the six respondents indicated that a deliberate focus on students in need was imperative. These needs could include anything from helping students facing the divorce of parents, their social or emotional needs, or troublesome home lives that impact the behavior and academic achievement of these students at school. These barriers can inhibit successful learning. Christiansen states that more and more children are becoming at risk for failure in school as a result of many factors including family structure, increased violence, abuse and neglect, and a variety of disabilities. These barriers can affect student achievement, behavior, and social and emotional competency.<sup>8</sup>

Students who struggle with the needs previously mentioned are considered to be a priority expectation of school counselors in the data of this research. In response to how the respondents are encouraged to work with the school counselor, Emma states “teachers are encouraged to contact the counselor when behavior or issues at home causes problems with students’ learning.” Respondents Emma and Charley mentioned that the counselor is present to help students with issues or problems that might be interfering with academic achievement. The respondents continued by stating that these issues could include social and emotional issues as well as parents divorcing. When asked about the suggested primary contribution of the school counselor, many respondents stated that the counselor should help students with needs that go beyond the classroom such as emotional and social issues as well as issues at home.

There is definitely a need for counseling intervention regarding major situations that can cause inappropriate emotional and social behavior or distractions in the classroom. On the other hand, what about the students who do not struggle from this degree of difficulty? Are these students’ emotional needs considered by the counselor or classroom teachers? As shown in the results of this study as well as previous research, much focus is placed on the major social and emotional needs of students. While these needs are becoming more common in schools, there are some students who do not face these issues who would still benefit from counseling. These can be students who struggle with low self-esteem, confidence, as well as many perceived “minor” issues that tend to be overshadowed by the

more significant needs listed above. How would academic achievement school-wide be impacted if all needs were addressed, including minor needs that are not as evident as some of the major needs mentioned above? If students facing minor issues perceive the counselor to be focused solely on students with high needs alone, they could begin to feel as though their needs are not worthy to be considered by someone else. In order to reach the goals, such as overall achievement, that have been set by school districts across the country, every student’s needs should be considered, both major or minor.

Some schools are beginning to address this by adding part-time counselors from outside companies specializing in more significant needs of students. This opens up time for students who do not suffer from more severe social and emotional needs to see the counselor for their needs as well. However, if teachers characterize the counselor as someone who is there to serve only a certain population of students, some students might interpret this as though the door of the counselor’s room is closed to them. This can lead to more severe emotional and behavioral issues due to minor issues being ignored and overlooked. Teachers and counselors should collaborate on the needs of each student. This will allow for all students’ needs to be addressed regardless of the severity of each need.

### *Strengths of the study*

This research provided qualitative data on the expectations and perceptions that elementary teachers have of elementary school counselors. The information gained from this research allows educators, counselors, and administrators to understand the strenuous demands that can occur from varied perspectives and expectations. This allowed for a focused study into the expectations and perceptions of teachers in this area. Quantitative data would not have provided feedback that was as in-depth as the data received from the survey. The participant population of this study allowed new and veteran educators who are invested in advanced degrees to be reached. The qualitative nature of the research, as well as the population, allowed for valued insight to an aspect of elementary education that affects students, teachers, and a school as a whole. Also, the small nature of this study allowed for a closer view of various perceived school issues as well as perceptions and expectations of school counselors from their elementary teacher colleagues. The survey design allowed for complete confidentiality that likely facilitated candid responses, even critical ones, to be heard. This potentially allowed for more accurate information to

be presented in the results of this research. This information can open the door for administrators, teachers, and counselors to gain insight on the issues that can arise from the undefined duties of a school counselor and how they coincide with the expectations and perceptions of school counselors held by various stakeholders.

### *Limitations of the study*

The purposeful sample of participants could be seen as a potential limitation to this research. The participants were selected from one graduate program at a southeastern university. Therefore, a limited portrait of teachers’ perceptions and expectations was provided. Also, the limitation to only six survey responses, a low response rate, did not provide as many aspects of feedback as hoped for in the outset of this study, whereas twenty or more responses would have been preferred. Due to the small scale of this study, the results are not generalizable. Further one-on-one interviews or focus groups might have allowed for deeper responses.

### *Further research*

Many directions need to be pursued subsequent to this research. First and foremost, research that focuses on a broader range of participants should be conducted. This research, as well as many studies from the past, has focused on one area, subgroup, or location. Also, research pertaining to the expectations of school counselors’ roles and duties as described by school counselors, teachers, and administrators should be considered. This approach will facilitate comparisons between the three stakeholders. A more detailed description of the actual daily roles of the school counselor could be completed after reconciling differences of expectations between stakeholders. Research that categorizes the time counselors’ spend on each job duty would provide insight as to how great the need for more counselors is (in efforts to fulfill the demands made by students, teachers and administrators). Due to the increase in school testing and data tracking, a continued look at the pseudo-administrative roles often held by counselors and the effects this places on the other duties of counselors is needed.

### **Conclusion**

Counseling has been a part of many schools since the late nineteenth century. Over time, the purpose of counseling, the roles of the school counselor, and the perceptions and expectations that various stakeholders have of the school counselor have undergone several changes. Teachers

are a defining aspect of the educational system, and therefore their expectations weigh heavily on the roles of the school counselor. Although the expectations and perceptions of teachers tend to vary by location, years of experience, and perceived needs of students, common themes do exist. The expectations and perceptions that teachers have of school counselors can help shape and define the actual roles and duties of school counselors. Teachers and counselors impact students in endless ways. With collaboration and consultation, and time afforded for both, these two defining parties can make a world of difference for many students.

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### Appendix A Survey Questions

1. How many years experience do you have as a teacher?
2. What grade level/subject area(s) do you teach?
3. Briefly describe the demographic profile of your school. Please do not identify the school by name.
4. Does your school have a counselor/guidance counselor? If so, how many?
5. Are you encouraged to work with the school counselor? If so, how?
6. In what ways, if any, has the school counselor worked with your students?
7. What assistance, if any, do you expect from a school counselor in regards to helping students gain academic achievement? In what ways has this been helpful or not to academic achievement?
8. Do you feel that it is within a counselor's duties to help students with behavior issues in the classroom? If so, how do you believe this should be achieved?
9. What is the primary contribution, if any, you feel that a school counselor provides for you as a teacher, the students, and the school as a whole?
10. What are the challenges and limitations, if any, of working with a school guidance counselor?